

# **TOWN OF HILTON HEAD ISLAND PUBLIC FACILITIES COMMITTEE**

Date: March 2, 2010

Time: 2:00 P.M.

Members Present: John Safay, George Williams, Drew Laughlin

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Curtis Coltrane, Scott Liggett, Charles Cousins, Brian Hulbert,  
Randy Nicholson, Marcy Benson, Jayme Lopko

Others Present: Ken Heitzke, Bill Harkins, *Councilmen*, Frank Soule, *Island  
Recreation Association*, Chet Williams, Esquire

Media Present: Laura Nahmias, *The Island Packet*

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**1. Call to Order.**

The meeting was called to order at 2:08 P.M.

**2. FOIA Compliance:**

Public notification of this meeting has been published, posted and mailed in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act and the Town of Hilton Head Island requirements.

**3. Committee Business:**

Councilman Williams moved to approve the Minutes of February 2, 2010. Councilman Laughlin seconded. The Minutes of February 2, 2010 were unanimously approved.

Councilman Williams moved to approve the Minutes of February 18, 2010. Councilman Laughlin seconded. The Minutes of February 18, 2010 were unanimously approved.

**4. Unfinished Business:**

Sailing and Rowing Center Proposal

Marcy Benson, Senior Grants Administrator stated staff recommends the Town not move forward with the proposed Sailing & Rowing Center. The anticipated private funding has been significantly reduced and the associated construction costs and the projected operating costs have been increased.

In 2005, a private citizens group proposed a sailing and rowing center be located on Town owned property. This proposal was endorsed by the Town's Parks and Recreation Commission and forwarded to Town Council. As part of this effort the citizen's group prepared a site plan and estimated construction cost of \$1.5 million and committed to a donation of \$1 million towards the proposed center. The operations and management of the facility would be handled by the Island

Recreation Association. This project proposal was presented to the Public Facilities Committee in 2009 and included the original construction costs, operating costs, operating costs projected by the Island Recreation Association, and a reduction in private donations as reported by the private citizens group. At this meeting, the Committee asked for the construction and operating cost to be updated.

The 2009 revised construction cost estimate is \$2.6 million. The citizen's group expressed the ability to raise \$100,000 in cash donations and \$330,000 in donated equipment (currently being used in existing sailing program), for a total contribution of \$430,000. This significant reduction in private funding would mean \$2.2 million in Town funds would be needed to construct the facility. In addition to the Town funds for facility construction, the Town funded portion of the proposed annual operating budget for the facility (prepared by the Island Recreation Association) would be approximately \$67,000 for a non-staffed facility or \$200,000 for a staffed facility.

Staff reviewed the option of phasing this project:

Phase One: Construction (\$1.8 million)

Currently the South Carolina Sailing Center has expressed the ability for their group to raise \$100,000 in cash and donate the existing equipment used in their current sailing programs for use at the proposed facility. This equipment has an approximate value of \$330,000. This would leave approximately \$1.3 million for the Town to fund.

Phase Two: Remaining Construction and Additional Equipment (\$883,000)

Costs in Phase Two include remaining vertical construction, general items, program equipment, specialty items, office furnishings, electrical, a launch ramp and additional floating docks. Phase Two costs are currently budgeted at \$883,000, which would be financed with Town funds unless additional private donations above the currently pledged \$430,000 can be obtained.

Ms. Benson advised that the property that we are looking at is the former Seafood Coop site on Squire Pope Road which is now Town owned property. There is a current pier there, but as you know, it is in dilapidated condition. Not only would the pier and the dock need to be refurbished, there is also quite a bit of debris that would need to be cleaned up.

Chairman Safay opened up the floor to the public for their questions and comments.

Andrea Helfrich questioned what timeframe the budgets were based on and perhaps another look should be taken due to the change in economy and more people looking for work.

Lou Strayer, representing the Palmetto Rowing Club and the Carolina Sailing Club spoke in favor of going forward and proposed that we build the minimum necessary to store the boats, launch them, care for them and to run a program which would not be fully staffed 24 hours a day, but only when the program is operating. We can get away with and can row with and sail with a lot less to start. If we can get started, we could get a lot of donated lumber and knows at least two licensed contractors to

oversee the project. There are a lot of people willing to put in some sweat equity and we can make this a class facility.

Claire Morda who is on the Board of Directors of the Sailing & Rowing Center pointed out that we have been trying to go forward with this for 12 years and we have gone no place. I believe this is really important to the future of the Island.

Chairman Safay asked Ms. Morda what was the status of the fundraising? Has the momentum been lost? Ms. Morda stated that the problem in attempting to raise money is that there never has been a site so we have only been able to raise dribs and drabs. If we have a place to show people they would be more likely to donate money.

Dave Urdman stated it is very difficult to raise money for a dream only. If we had a commitment to a piece of ground then we could bring people out and show them and tell them all we have to do is raise the money and it is ours.

Jim Vaughan, Board Member for the Carolina Sailing Center advised the Committee never has the Board promised the Town that they would donate anything approaching \$1 million.

John Parker reinforced what others said that they can start small. The idea would be if the Town could simply provide water access – not only the land, but the necessary dock and clean up the area. They have a floating dock that they would bring over there. Several chain link fences could be used to secure the various sailing and rowing boats.

Muffy Scholes, Katherine Harris, Joyce Wright, Louise Miller Cohen, Jack Berry, Rod Brady, Ed Forest and Tom Webster spoke in favor of the proposed Sailing & Rowing Center.

Chet Williams advised he is impressed by the obvious level of support throughout the community that this project has. One of the reasons that governments exist are to provide opportunities to the citizens that individuals or small groups on their own cannot provide. The Town brought that piece of property several years ago and it has remained fallow since. Unless the Town intends to continue on in its current condition, it seems that most of the expenses that are figured in the budget Town staff has prepared are going to have to be spent anyway if the property is to be made usable for the general public. This is a project that really does merit the consideration of the Town and I recommend that you give further consideration and move forward with this project.

Chairman Safay asked Scott Liggett to clarify what was in the budget. Mr. Liggett advised that the project has remained as a placeholder in this year's fiscal year budget. The only caveat or clarification I would provide is that while the funding is identified at \$150,000, that amount is predicated at receiving donations. There isn't any public money that is at stake or is necessarily reflected in the budget.

Councilman Williams stated he has been on Town Council for nine years and he could not remember a time when they looked at water front property that we didn't consider access for a sailing and rowing club of some sort. It is not like we haven't

been trying. I think that in looking back, one of the things that happens when you start looking at rebuilding the docks as a public project they are going to have to be built to a higher standard than you would build on your own. There are some costs involved with commercial construction vs. private construction that typically is higher. Having said that, I like what I heard from the community on trying to make this go forward in a smaller step by step procedure. I would like to see some way of having staff get together with a few people in the community and see what could be done in a very small manner just to kick this thing off.

Councilman Laughlin said he is definitely not in favor of killing the project. Chet Williams preempted a good bit of what I was going to say because we have acquired this site for the very purpose of taking advantage of its access to the water. It seems to me that one way or another we will be spending funds to improve it. It makes no sense to own this site and not repair the dock or have a useful dock there. It ought to be possible to start thinking that way and mapping out some sort of timetable for getting those kinds of improvements done and entering into some arrangement that would enable the sailing and rowing folks to be able to go out and say we have a home here. I also like what I hear in trying to phase in the rest of it, although I do think a certain standard has to be adhered to. There is a need for this and to not take advantage of that site and the opportunities that that site affords just doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

Chairman Safay stated he is tired of saying no to this project and is tired of saying next year, six months, etc. I probably will not endear myself with staff, but not only do I not want to take staff's recommendation for not moving forward, I want us to become proactive in this thing. Maybe there is a Plan "B" that we are not looking at and maybe it takes staff to sit down informally with a few folks and say what can we do now? Let's clean the site up – it is an embarrassment to the Town of Hilton Head Island. It is time for us to find the way. If we have to spend money that we don't have right now, let's do it – let's find it. Let's get smart and do this incrementally. There are standards that we have to maintain, but within those standards, a community like ours surely can find a way to put together the beginnings of a program like this. I am not even convinced that this is the best location for this, but until such time as Town Council can find a better location, or maybe it never will and this will be the location, we need to stop dragging our feet and let's start moving on it.

Charles Cousins, Director of Community Development advised the Committee that staff did not want to say no to the project today and I want to clarify that I believe we have ever said no to this project. What we have said all along and in spite of what Mr. Vaughan said, there was a commitment of \$1 million to be raised to do this. We have always said raise the money and we will do it.

After additional discussion, Councilman Laughlin moved that the Public Facilities Committee recommend to Town Council that we adopt that they come up with some sort of plan within the Capital Improvements Budget to move forward with cleaning up the site and rehabilitating the dock and have staff come back within 4-6 weeks with preliminary data. Councilman Williams seconded. The motion unanimously passed.

**5. New Business**

None

**6. Adjournment:**

Councilman Williams moved to adjourn. Councilman Laughlin seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 3:18 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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**Karen D. Knox**  
**Senior Administrative Assistant**